



Understanding Anxiety

— Empowering Resilient Families —



Introductions

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Anxiety is a natural response to
a perceived **THREAT** or *stress*



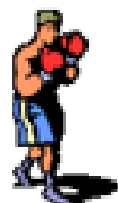
Adrenalin

Adrenalin

Raised Arousal Level

Adrenalin

Adrenalin



Fight

Freeze

Flight





Smoke Alarm Analogy

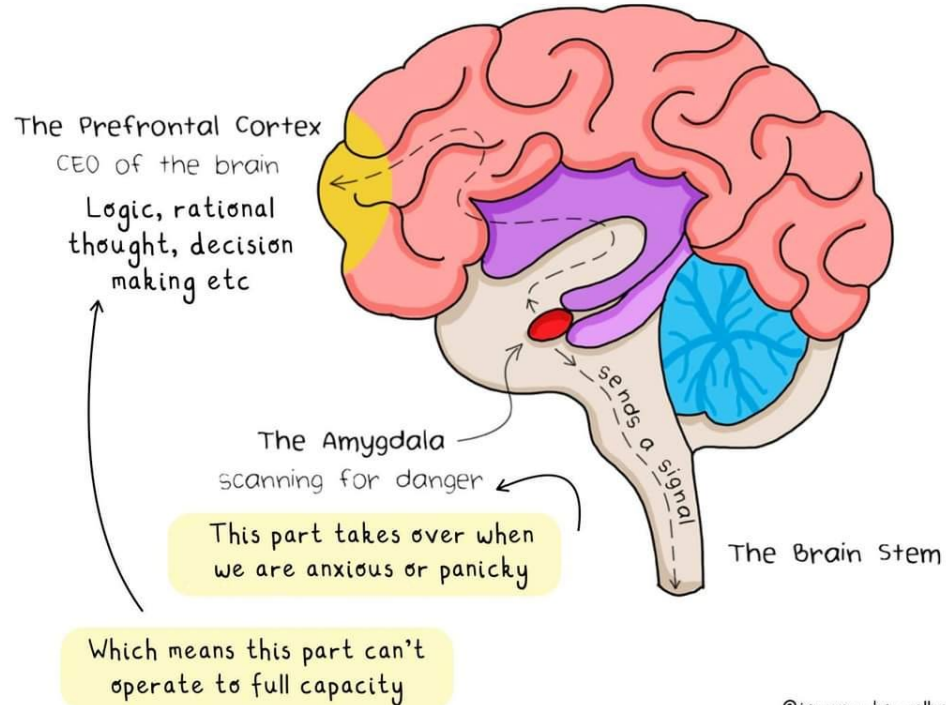
**Smoke \neq
Fire**



THE ANXIOUS BRAIN

Anxiety is normal!

Learning about the brain can help you understand what you are feeling and WHY.





How Anxiety May Manifest in Children

- Physical Symptoms
- Trouble sleeping
- Worrying, seeking reassurance
- Avoidance
- Behavior Changes
- Emotional Responses
- Irritability and anger
- Perfectionism
- Social difficulties
- Academic challenges





“Anxiety is actually quite simple. Anxiety is a method of seeking two experiences: *certainty* and *comfort*. The problem is that it wants these two outcomes *immediately* and *continually*, yet life is full of surprises and discomforts big and small.”

Pg. 16



Anxious Kids, Anxious Parents, Lynn Lyons & Reid Wilson



Normalizing Uncomfortable Feelings





Where Does Increased Anxiety Come From?

Nature (Biology)

Child inherits a genetic predisposition to be more cautious and see threats more readily

Nurture (Environment)

Traumas/External Stresses
Family modeling
Messaging/Values
Culture
Social media

Both



Expecting the Discomfort

Adult's task then is to tolerate and ride the wave.





What may make it worse

- Reassuring and over protecting
- Solving the problems for your child
- Keeping your child away from difficulties
- Hop on the emotional rollercoaster
- Model your own anxious behaviors

Avoid "Doing the Disorder"

If anxiety wants it, it'll just make it stronger



“At Risk Youth”

1. Youth impacted by crime, poverty, discrimination
2. Youth impacted by “excessive pressure to excel”

Both groups have increased likelihood of anxiety, depression, substance use



Be Aware of a Toxic Achievement Culture

- Excessive pressure to succeed
- Fear of failure
- Unhealthy competition
- Neglect of well-being
- Narrow definition of success
- External validation
- Lack of balance
- Seeking perfection



Messages to Convey

RELATIONSHIPS

VALUES



What can I do to help?

1. Expect children to pitch in - chores
2. Allow them to struggle and fail
3. Praise perseverance and remind them they have done hard things before
4. Celebrate effort



What can I do to help part 2

5. Help kids find their passions & encourage them to try new things
6. Embrace imperfection - everyone has strengths and weaknesses
7. Self-reliance and skill building
8. Show your love



Messages to Convey

- SKILLS versus OUTCOMES
- Mistakes are required for growth
- Growth is often uncomfortable
- There is not a narrow definition of success
- Balance is crucial
- Sometimes you have to find the “good enough” when prioritizing

Suggested Family Mantras

We Can Do Hard Things

I'm Glad You Like to Learn

I Like To See You Try New Things

Balance Is the Key to Happy Life

Mistakes Are How We Learn



Alison Gopnik

The **mark of successful parenting** isn't about whether your child brings home a **gold medal** or gets into an **Ivy League college**.

RAISING
YOURSELF

The **mark of successful parenting** is whether your grown child **still wants a relationship with you** when they no longer have to rely **on you to survive**.



Resources

Books

- *Anxious Kids, Anxious Parents* by Reid Wilson & Lynn Lyons
- *Never Enough*, by Jennifer Wallace

Resources for Children

- *What to Do When You Worry Too Much*
- *Playing With Anxiety: Casey's Guide*, by Lynn Lyons
- *Worry Says What*, by Allison Edward

Podcasts

- *Flusterclux*, with Lynn Lyons
- *Ask Lisa*, with Lisa Demour



Resources

Therapy and Parent Consultation
Psychological and Educational Assessment
Educational Consultation



**Counseling and Assessment
Practice of Fairfax**

capfairfax.com





Resources Fairfax:

Family Resource Center (FRC): The FRC offers workshops, consultations, and resources to help families support their children's educational and emotional needs. They cover a wide range of topics, including anxiety management strategies.

<https://www.fcps.edu/resources/family-engagement/family-resource-center>

Student Wellness: Tips and Strategies <https://www.fcps.edu/student-wellness-tips>

FCPS School Psychologists/Social workers and Counselors

Community-Based Support -

Fairfax County Government Mental Health Services: <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/community-services-board/mental-health>

NAMI Northern Virginia: The National Alliance on Mental Illness offers support groups, educational programs, and resources specifically tailored for families dealing with mental health conditions, including anxiety. <https://nami-northernvirginia.org/>

Healthy Minds Fairfax: <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/healthymindsfairfax/>